

THE LIBERTY "BOYS OF '76"

A Weekly Magazine containing Stories of the American Revolution.

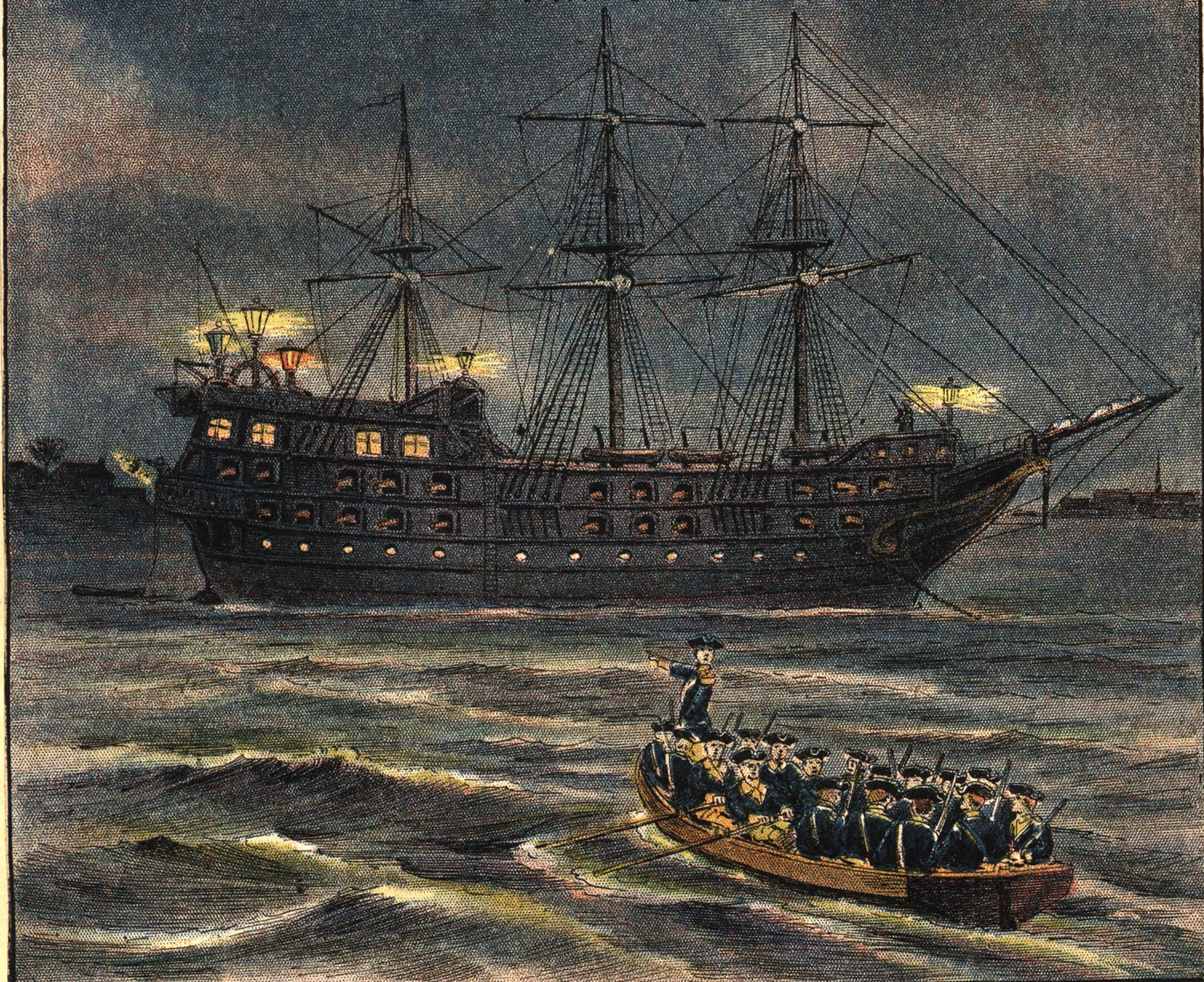
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No. 17.

NEW YORK, APRIL 26, 1901.

Price 5 Cents.

THE LIBERTY BOYS' GREAT STROKE; OR CAPTURING A BRITISH MAN-OF-WAR. BY HARRY MOORE.



"There is the signal, boys," said Bob, in a low, intense tone. "Now to capture the British man-of-war!"

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CHAPTER I.

IN A TREETOP.

"Say, Dick, I believe the British are leaving, sure enough, is time!"

"I believe you're right, Bob."

"I know I am, Dick. There is no feint or pretense about this time."

"It looks that way."

"Yes, and it is that way. The British have got enough trying to out-general General Washington, and they are headed for New York, or I am badly fooled."

"I guess you're right, Bob. The entire army is moving."

"They couldn't get past the patriot army and move on Philadelphia. General Washington was too smart for them. Hurrah!"

It was the last day of June, 1777.

Two youths, of about eighteen years, occupied positions the very top of one of the largest and tallest trees in the timber bordering on the Raritan river in the State of New Jersey.

The youths were Dick Slater and Bob Estabrook.

They were members of a company of youths of about their own age.

The members of this company were known as the "Liberty Boys of '76."

Dick had organized the company nearly a year before, and had been made its captain.

During the year just passed, this company of "Liberty Boys" had done wonderful work for the patriot cause.

It had taken part in a number of important battles.

In all of these battles the "Liberty Boys" had shown great courage, and fought with wonderful energy and valor.

The energy and enthusiasm which they put into their work when attacking the British was inspiring to the older soldiers.

It caused them to fight with more energy and determination.

The "Liberty Boys" had done good work in the line of scouting and foraging, also.

General Washington appreciated the work the "Liberty Boys" had done, and gave them full credit for it.

The commander-in-chief thought a great deal of Dick Slater.

Dick, although but a boy in years, was General Washington's most trusted spy and scout.

Washington had a number of men scouts and spies, but Dick had been more successful than any of them.

And he and Bob were on a scouting expedition now.

During the last half of the winter, all spring, and up to the present time, the British had occupied a position at New Brunswick.

During most of that time, the patriot army had occupied a position at Morristown Heights, about twenty-five miles distant from New Brunswick.

While upon a spying expedition within the British lines, during the first week in June, Dick had learned that the British intended moving on Philadelphia.

The British generals, Howe and Cornwallis, had decided upon June 12 as the day upon which to make the movement.

Dick had hastened to Washington with the information.

Washington made up his mind that he would not permit the British to put their plan in execution if he could help it.

He thought that he could.

He moved his army down and took up a position at Middlebrook, distant only about ten miles from New Brunswick.

From this point he would be enabled to head the British off when they made their movement toward Philadelphia.

By taking up a position in the timber along the road the British would have to traverse, his army of eight thousand men would be at least equal to the British army of eighteen thousand men.

The British generals were alive to this fact.

They made a number of attempts to get past Washington's army and go on to Philadelphia, but were unsuccessful each and every time.

By the use of scouts and messengers mounted on fleet horses, Washington was enabled to keep informed of the

movements of the enemy, and he was always there with his army to head them off and drive them back.

To tell the truth, the British generals were afraid that if they did get past, Washington would get in behind them and cut off their communication with New Brunswick and New York, and eventually encompass their destruction or capture.

And now, after eighteen days of maneuvering, by which the British had gained nothing, they were, Dick and Bob were confident, withdrawing from New Brunswick and retiring to New York.

As we have said, Dick and Bob were on a spying and scouting expedition.

They had been riding along the road, about a mile distant from New Brunswick, when they fancied they heard the faint roll of a drum in the distance.

They wondered what it could mean.

They dismounted, and leading their horses into the timber tied them to trees.

Then they selected the largest tree, of which we have already made mention, and climbed it.

It was a hard task, but the youths had been raised in the timber and they had never seen the tree they could not climb.

When they reached the top of the tree they were well rewarded for their trouble and pains.

They had a magnificent view from the treetop.

They could see New Brunswick plainly.

It did not seem to be more than half a mile away.

They could see the soldiers moving about.

From where they were it looked like a giant beehive.

The soldiers going into and coming out of the houses reminded the youths of bees going into and coming out of their hives.

The brilliant red coats of the British soldiers made them objects easy to be seen.

The roll of the drum could be heard now with more distinctness than when the youths were down in the road.

While the youths watched, the British army began to move.

A column was seen leaving the town and advancing up the road.

It was then that the conversation ensued between Dick and Bob, as given at the head of this chapter.

There was no doubt but that Dick and Bob were right.

The British were undoubtedly leaving New Brunswick. Generals Howe and Cornwallis had become discouraged.

They decided that there was no use trying to outwit General Washington.

He was altogether too wily and wideawake for them.

He had checkmated their every move.

And they did not doubt that he would be able to checkmate any moves they might make in future.

So, disheartened and discouraged, they had given up the idea of trying to move across New Jersey and capture Philadelphia, and on this morning of which we write they had given the order for the army to retire toward New York.

Dick and Bob watched the advancing column with interest.

It drew slowly nearer and nearer.

The men grew in size and became plainer to the sight of the youths.

"What shall we do, Dick?" asked Bob.

"What do you mean, Bob?" asked Dick.

"I mean shall we stay here and keep watch of the British, or shall we return at once to Middlebrook and inform General Washington of what is taking place?"

Dick was silent for a few moments.

He looked toward the ground and seemed to be pondering.

"I'll tell you, Bob," he said, presently; "it is my belief that General Washington will be glad to have the British return to New York."

"I think so, too, Dick."

"Therefore he would not wish to do anything to keep them from making the move."

"Certainly not."

"And that being the case, I do not think it necessary to take the news to the commander-in-chief immediately."

"Then we will stay here?"

"Yes, Bob."

"How long?"

"Until the British army has passed."

"Until the army has passed, eh?"

"Yes."

"And then what?"

"Then we'll get down out of this tree, Bob."

"So I supposed," dryly. "And after we are down?"

"Then we will follow the British, Bob."

"Follow them!"

"Yes; why not?"

"What can we accomplish by following them, Dick?"

"Oh, I don't know, Bob. We may accomplish something, and we may not. We can at least make sure that they are returning to New York."

"I don't think there is any doubt about that, do you?"

"No; but it will be a good plan to make sure of it."

"Yes; you're right about that."

The youths now ceased talking.

They kept their attention fixed on the approaching body of redcoats.

The British were coming nearer and nearer.

The column of soldiers advancing in one continuous string from the town resembled some huge serpent crawling slowly forth from its den.

At times sections of the column were invisible, hidden by the trees bordering the road along which it was passing.

Presently the end of the column came in sight a quarter of a mile distant down the road.

It would soon be even with the tree in which the youths were perched.

As it drew near, Bob fidgeted slightly.

"Jove! Dick," he said; "what if some of those fellows should catch sight of us!"

"It would probably go hard with us, Bob."

"I rather think so, myself."

"They would probably use us as targets, and bring us down out of the tree as they would a couple of squirrels," said Dick, calmly.

"That's about what they would do, Dick. They'd enjoy trying their marksmanship on us."

"Yes; but I don't think there is any danger of their discovering our presence here."

"I guess not. One thing, there is considerable foliage on this tree, and we can conceal ourselves behind the body of it."

"So we can, Bob; I think we are perfectly safe up here. All we will have to do will be to sit still and keep quiet."

Again the youths relapsed into silence.

The front end of the column was almost even with them now.

Presently it was abreast them.

It seemed as though they were looking straight down on the redcoats.

The British soldiers made a brave showing in their brilliant uniforms.

They seemed in excellent spirits.

They were laughing and talking as they walked along. Some of them were even singing.

"They seem to be quite happy, Dick," whispered Bob.

"So they do," replied Dick, in a low, cautious tone.

"I guess they are glad to think they are going back to New York, and will not have to do any more of this marching and counter-marching which they have been indulging in daily for the last two or three weeks."

"True, Bob; and I guess our boys will be glad it is over with, too."

"I guess you're right about that. I know I for one shall be glad."

"General Washington will be glad, too."

"I should think he would be."

"Yes; this is virtually a victory for him."

"So it is, Bob."

The youths watched the moving column with interest.

They wondered how long it would take the army to pass.

Dick decided that it would take it three or four hours at the least.

This would be quite a while to remain in the treetop.

Dick almost wished they had gone down out of the tree before the head of the column reached them.

"It was too late now, however."

They would have to stick it out and make the best of the situation.

Dick and Bob soon wished they had not remained in the treetop, for another reason other than that of its being tiresome.

One of the redcoats, sharper-eyed than his fellows, was looking up into the trees as he walked along, and he happened to espy a squirrel on one of the topmost limbs of the tree in which Dick and Bob were perched.

"Say, fellows!" he cried to his comrades; "yonder is a squirrel! Watch me bring him down at the first shot!"

A score of the redcoat's comrades looked up and saw the squirrel.

Up went the muzzles of as many muskets.

The soldiers did not stop, but pointed the muskets upward as they walked along.

"Great guns! Dick; they're going to shoot!" whispered Bob, excitedly. "They'll miss the squirrel and riddle us with bullets!"

Crash, roar!

The redcoats had fired.

CHAPTER II.

A DANGEROUS ASSIGNMENT.

Not a bullet touched the squirrel.

With a defiant chirp, and a whisk of his bushy tail, the squirrel disappeared, having run down the limb and into a hole in the body of the tree.

But Dick and Bob?

The bullets whistled past them, some of the leaden missiles coming much closer than was conducive to comfort.

Some of the bullets struck the body of the tree behind which were the youths.

"Phew!" whistled Bob. "That is more than we bargained for, Dick!"

"You're right! I hope the redcoats won't sight any more squirrels up in this tree."

"So do I."

The redcoats, laughing at their failure to bring down the squirrel, and never for one moment suspecting that they had come within an ace of bringing down much bigger game, i. e., two "rebel" spies, went on their way.

It did take the British army more than four hours to pass the impromptu reviewing stand of Dick and Bob.

Much to the satisfaction of Dick and Bob, the squirrel did not come out again and perch itself on the limb where it might be seen by the redcoats, and thus tempt them to further attempts in the way of sharpshooting.

Doubtless the noise made by the volley fired by the British had given the little animal a severe scare, and it thought best to keep out of sight for awhile.

When at last the British army had passed where the youths were stationed, the two drew long breaths of relief.

"I'm glad that's over with, Dick," said Bob.

"So am I."

"Let's get down from here."

"We'd better wait a little while. Let's wait till they get a little farther away."

"All right; but if I don't get down pretty soon, I'll fall down."

"That would be the quickest way to get down, Bob."

"Yes, but not the most satisfactory."

When the rear end of the long column of British soldiers was a quarter of a mile distant up the road, Dick and Bob slowly and carefully climbed out of the tree.

Their legs were so stiff they could hardly stand, owing to the cramped position they had been in while up in the tree.

A little exercise fixed them all right, however. Then they made their way to where their horses were tied.

Untying the horses the youths led them out to the road.

They waited until the redcoats had disappeared around a bend in the road—the road crooking and winding through the timber—and then, mounting, they rode after them.

By being very careful and pausing when they reached a bend in the road the youths were enabled to follow the redcoats without the fact being discovered by their enemies.

The youths followed the British army several hours, and from a treetop a mile distant, they had the satisfaction finally, of seeing the redcoats embarking in boats and crossing over to Staten Island.

"I wonder what that means?" said Bob. "I supposed they were going to New York."

"Well, it's practically the same thing," said Dick. "You see, the ships constituting the fleet of Admiral Howe, General Howe's brother, are anchored nearer to the Staten Island shore than to New York City," and General Howe probably wishes to be where he could confer with his brother as quickly and with as little trouble as possible."

"I judge you are right, Dick. Well, what shall we do now?"

"I guess we might as well return to Middlebrook as of once, Bob, and take the news to General Washington."

"I guess that is the thing to do."

The youths descended from the treetop, and mounting their horses, took the back track.

They rode at a good pace now.

They did not have to go slow and feel their way.

They rode at a gallop.

They took a more direct route than they had come.

By so doing, the distance to Middlebrook was reduced to about eighteen miles.

They made the distance in about two hours.

This brought them to Middlebrook about seven o'clock in the evening.

Dick went at once to the headquarters of the commander-in-chief.

General Washington was glad to see Dick.

He greeted Dick very pleasantly.

"So you are back, Dick?" he remarked; "did you learn anything that is of importance?"

"I think so, your excellency," replied Dick. "I have come to inform you that the British have evacuated New Brunswick, and have retired to Staten Island!"

"What!" exclaimed the commander-in-chief; "say you so, Dick? And have they indeed done this?"

"Yes, your excellency."

"When did the movement back to Staten Island take place?"

"This very day, your excellency."

"To-day?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you saw the British leaving New Brunswick?"

"We did, your excellency."

General Washington was silent for a few moments. Then he said:

"May it not be possible that this is another feint on the part of the British?"

"You mean that they simply pretended to move back Staten Island, and that in reality they did not intend to evacuate New Brunswick?"

"Yes; that is what I mean."

"No, that is not possible, your excellency, for the entire British army has moved over onto Staten Island. Bob and I were in a treetop by the roadside, a mile from New Brunswick, and saw the army leave New Brunswick. It took them four hours to pass the point where we were stationed."

"Ah! How do you know the army went over onto Staten Island, instead of to New York City?"

"We followed it, your excellency, and from a treetop a mile distant saw the army embark in boats and cross over to Staten Island."

"Ah! Well, this is good news, indeed, Dick! The British have virtually given up New Jersey!"

"So it seems, sir."

General Washington rose and paced the floor for several minutes.

His hands were clasped behind his back, his head was inclined forward, and he was looking down at the floor.

It was evident that he was thinking deeply.

At last he turned to Dick.

"Dick," he said, earnestly; "I am puzzled not a little by the action of the British. It is hard to foretell what it portends. Of course the British will try something else now, and the question is, what will they try?"

The commander-in-chief paused for a few moments and looked at the floor.

He was studying the situation.

Dick remained silent.

He suspected that he would be given some work to do.

And this would suit him exactly.

He was right about thinking he would be given work to do.

The next words of the commander-in-chief proved this.

"Dick," he said, "you have been very successful as a spy and scout—more successful, I may say, than any other spy I have."

"I am glad if I have been of benefit to the great cause, and have been successful in securing information that has been of use to you, your excellency," said Dick, quietly and modestly.

"You have been very successful, Dick, as I have said; and now I think I shall have to give you some more difficult and dangerous work of the same nature to do."

"I shall be glad to attempt it, your excellency."

"You are always ready and willing, Dick."

"It is my duty, your excellency."

"And like a brave soldier, you are always ready to do your duty."

"I hope I shall always be ready, sir."

"I am sure you will be, Dick."

The commander-in-chief was silent for a few moments, and then he went on:

"Now that the British have evacuated New Brunswick and retired to Staten Island, it becomes very important that I should have information regarding their future intentions, if it is possible to secure such information. Are you willing to try to secure the information for me, Dick?"

"I shall be glad to be deputed to make the attempt, your excellency! I deem it an honor to be chosen by you for such important work!"

"Well, I choose you because of the fact that you have been more successful in such work than have either of the other spies I have. I choose you for the work for the reason that your past success entitles you to first choice."

"Then you wish me to go into the British lines on Staten Island, and spy upon the British, and learn all that I can of their plans?"

"That is what I wish you to do, Dick? Are you ready to undertake it?"

"Yes, indeed, your excellency!"

"When will you start?"

"Within the hour, your excellency."

"Good! And you will bring me information promptly, if you succeed in securing some?"

"As promptly as possible, sir. I shall take Bob Estabrook along, and as soon as I learn aught of value, I will send him to you with the information."

"Very good; that will be a good idea."

The commander-in-chief talked to Dick for ten or fifteen minutes longer, and gave him instructions.

"Be very careful, my boy," he said, as Dick was leaving; "don't let the British capture you."

"I will be careful, your excellency," said Dick.

Then he bade the great man good-by, and, saluting, withdrew.

"Well, what did the commander-in-chief say when you told him the British had gone?" asked Bob, when Dick returned to the quarters occupied by the company of "Liberty Boys."

"He was very much surprised, Bob."

"I thought he would be."

"But he was very well pleased, also."

"Yes?"

"Yes; and now, Bob, we have some work ahead of us."

"What kind of work, Dick?"

"Spy work."

Bob jumped up and danced a double-shuffle on the floor.

"Good!" he cried; "I'm glad of it! We are to go among the British, then!"

"Yes."

"When?"

"At once!"

"At once?"

"Yes."

"Hurrah! I'm ready!"

Bob was of a somewhat excitable temperament.

He was enthusiastic in whatever he did.

But a cooler and braver youth in battle, or when danger of any kind threatened, it would have been hard to find.

The other youths gathered around the two, and asked questions.

Dick explained the situation to them, and told them to hold themselves in readiness, so that they could come to wherever he might be, promptly, if sent for.

They said they would be in readiness to obey orders.

"I hope you'll be in a position that will enable you to send for us, Dick!" said Mark Morrison.

"And so do I!" declared Sam Sunderland.

The other youths all said the same.

"If I should see a chance to do a good stroke of work, I will send for you," said Dick; "and there is never any knowing but what such a chance may present itself."

"True," agreed Mark Morrison.

"If I need you, I will send Bob to let you know," said Dick.

"All right; we'll be on the lookout for him."

"All right; be in readiness for prompt action if Bob should come."

The youths again assured Dick that they would be in readiness, and then he and Bob quickly made their arrangements for the journey which they intended to take.

The first thing they did was to don British uniforms.

Of these they had several, which had been captured from the British, and taken from British prisoners.

In work of this kind, the uniforms came in handy.

In going into the British lines, it was almost an absolute necessity to have the British uniforms on.

Otherwise they would be very quickly discovered and captured.

This done, they looked to their pistols, and then, bidding their comrades good-by, they went out and mounted their horses and rode away in the darkness.

It was not the first time these two brave youths had started upon a perilous undertaking, but it is doubtful if

they ever started upon a more perilous one than this one upon which they were now bound.

But they were not worrying.

They were happy as could be.

They enjoyed the kind of work they were now engaging in.

CHAPTER III.

THE CABIN IN THE CLEARING.

It was quite dark.

The only light was the faint glimmer made by the brilliant stars, the moon not being up.

The youths knew the road well, however.

There was no danger that they would lose their way.

They were very familiar with the roads in this part of the State of New Jersey.

So they had no difficulty in keeping on the right road.

They did not ride as rapidly as they would have done had it been light, but they made very fair speed.

They consumed about three hours in traversing the distance between Middlebrook and the point where they would cross over to Staten Island.

This distance was about twenty miles.

So three hours was not so bad for a dark night's ride.

"How are we going to get across this stream, Dick?" asked Bob, as they drew rein at the edge of the stream which separates Staten Island from the main land.

"Our horses will have to swim across, Bob."

"Do you think they can do it, Dick?"

"Oh, yes; this stream is not so very wide."

"All right; you lead the way and I will follow. You are the commander-in-chief of this army of two."

Dick laughed.

"All right, Bob. Come on," and Dick rode into the water.

Bob followed.

The water was very shallow.

The horses were able to wade out for a distance of nearly fifty yards.

Then the water became of sufficient depth so that the horses were forced to swim.

It did not seem so very long before they touched bottom once more, however, and then the animals waded the rest of the way to the Staten Island shore.

Of course, the horses' feet made considerable noise splashing in the water.

This must have been heard on the shore, for when the youths were yet twenty yards from the shore there came the peremptory cry:

"Halt! Who comes there!"

The youths brought their horses to a stop instantly.

They realized the fact that they had reached the shore at a point where the pickets had been stationed by the British.

They would not dare venture ashore at this point.

They would stand a good chance of being shot, if they did so.

They would have to go up or down the stream a ways.

But how were they to accomplish this?

The pickets had heard the sound of the horses' feet splashing in the water.

They would hear the sound, if the youths tried to ride the horses up or down the stream.

The only thing to do, Dick decided, was to return to the New Jersey side, and go up or down the stream a ways before re-trying to cross.

He whispered this to Bob.

Then they turned their horses around as quietly as they could and started them back in the direction from which they had just come.

Of course, the horses made some noise.

It was heard by the pickets on the shore.

"Halt!" came the cry in a loud, fierce voice; "halt! or we will fire!"

Of course, Dick and Bob did not halt.

Nor did they make any reply.

They deemed silence their best safeguard.

They were sure the redcoats would fire, however.

So they leaned forward until they were lying almost on the necks of the horses.

It was lucky they took this precaution.

Otherwise they might not have escaped unscathed.

For the next instant there came the crash, roar! of several muskets.

The youths heard the sing, sing! of the bullets as they went past.

But none of the bullets took effect.

The horses were now in swimming water again, and did not make so much noise as when wading.

The redcoats fired another volley a few moments later.

But the youths escaped, though one of the horses was wounded slightly.

A few minutes later the youths reached the shore.

"My horse was hit by a bullet, Dick," said Bob; "let's see if we can find out whether or not he is badly hurt."

The youths dismounted.

They felt about carefully, and finally located the wound.

It was in the right thigh, but was a mere flesh wound.

The bullet had cut in only slightly.

The horse was not injured to speak of.

"He's all right," said Dick.

"Yes, and I'm glad of it!" from Bob. "I was afraid I would have to walk, if I got anywhere."

"He will be able to carry you as far as you will care to ride, Bob."

"I guess so."

"Well, we had better be moving, Bob."

"Which way shall we go?"

"I don't know as it matters. We will go farther south, I think, though. There will be less likelihood of our running onto more of the redcoats."

"All right; just as you say."

The youths mounted and rode away toward the south.

They kept close along the shore.

When they had gone perhaps half a mile they stopped.

"I guess this is far enough," said Dick.

"I should think so, Dick."

The youths rode into the water, and as soon as the water became too deep for the horses to wade, they struck out, swimming, and swam toward the other shore.

The youths would not have been greatly surprised had they been hailed again; but they were not, and they rode out onto the Staten Island shore.

"Now which way, Dick?" asked Bob.

"We will strike inland a ways, Bob."

"And then?"

"We will make our way northward, until we are in the vicinity of the British encampment."

"And then what will we do?"

"I don't know, Bob. We shall have to be governed by circumstances."

They started.

The moon was just rising.

In a short time it would furnish enough light so that the youths would be able to see to find their way.

Dick was glad of this.

It would help them very much, as they were not familiar with the lay of the land.

They had never been on Staten Island before.

Of course, the moonlight would act against them, in that it would make them more likely to be discovered by the British, but they would have to look out for that.

They rode eastward, through the scraggy underbrush and timber.

They went in that direction perhaps half a mile.

Then they turned and went in a northerly direction.

It was slow work.

They had to practically feel their way through the timber.

Another thing that made their situation rather precarious was the fact that they did not know just where the British encampment was.

They might stumble upon it at any moment.

This would be very awkward.

Dick wished to enter the British lines, but he wished to do it in his own time and way.

He did not wish to enter it as a suspect.

Nor did he wish his entrance to occasion notice or comment.

To be enabled to make a success of spying, he must get into the British encampment without attracting attention.

This could only be done by slipping in.

Presently the youths came to a little clearing in the timber.

The clearing was four or five acres in extent.

Near the centre was a log cabin.

In front of the cabin were two or three horses.

"Hold on, Bob," said Dick; "we had better investigate a bit before venturing up to the cabin. We don't know what we may be running into."

"That's right, Dick."

"You stay here, Bob, and hold the horses. I will go forward and investigate."

The youths dismounted.

Bob held the horses while Dick stole away in the direction of the cabin.

As Dick drew near the cabin, he heard loud voices.

The owners of the voices were evidently using threatening language.

Dick judged so, at least, though as yet he was not near enough to understand what was said.

He hastened forward, and, as he got nearer, he could hear the voice of a woman.

The woman's voice had a frightened sound.

"Now, what's going on in there?" thought Dick, "it sounds very much like an attempt by two or more men to buldoze and frighten a woman. I shall investigate this matter and if such proves to be the case, I think I shall have to take a hand in the affair."

Dick turned aside and made his way around to the rear of the cabin.

As he had hoped, there was a window in the rear of the cabin, and to this window Dick made his way.

Dick first looked through the window.

Within the cabin were three redcoats, a woman, and a girl of about seventeen years.

The woman and girl were evidently mother and daughter. Both seemed badly frightened.

Dick soon learned what it was that was causing the trouble.

The first words that came to Dick's ears after taking up his position at the window enlightened him.

The words were spoken by one of the redcoats.

"You had better tell us where he is, woman!" the fellow said, fiercely and threateningly. "We know he is somewhere around here, and we are going to find him, so you might as well tell us and save us the trouble of searching."

"But he is not here," the woman said, her voice trembling; "I have already told you that he has gone over into New Jersey."

"I don't believe it!"

"It is true, nevertheless. He went yesterday, and will not return for several days."

"Well, it's lucky for him if that is the case!" the redcoat declared.

"Why so?" the woman asked? "What has my husband done to injure you?"

"Oh, he has done nothing to injure me, personally, but General Howe has information to the effect that your husband, Sam Hardy, is a rebel, and he sent us here to capture him and bring him to the British encampment."

"It is false!" the woman exclaimed. "He is not a rebel, neither is he a Tory. He has been strictly neutral, and has done nothing to aid either the rebels or the British."

"Well, he who isn't for us is against us. This neutral business I don't think much of. If we get our hands on your husband, we shall take him to General Howe, and he will then have to declare himself as being loyal to his king, or be shot as a rebel."

"Well, I am very glad my husband is not here!" the woman said with some show of spirit, "and I must say, that if that is the way the representatives of King George act, I don't think my husband would care to join them and swear allegiance to such a king!"

"Oh, ho! there is no doubt but that you are a rebel, woman! You had better be careful!"

"Why? Do the king's soldiers make war on women?"

The redcoat laughed shortly.

"No," he said; "the king's soldiers don't make war on women, they think too much of them for that. There is one thing they do do when they get the opportunity, however, and that is, kiss them! And, by Jove! I think we shall have to take a kiss from the sweet lips of this pretty daughter of yours to pay us for our trouble in coming here and to make up for our disappointment at not finding your husband."

Then the redcoat leaped forward and seized the girl in his arms.

Mother and daughter were terribly frightened.

They gave utterance to loud screams.

"Help! Help!" they cried.

"Help is at hand!" cried a ringing voice, and a handsome youth leaped through the open doorway into the room.

CHAPTER IV.

DICK IN ACTION.

The youth, of course, was Dick Slater.

He had heard the words of the redcoat, had seen his action, and with an exclamation of anger, had run around the cabin to the front door.

He reached the door just as the mother and daughter screamed and cried for help.

He bounded through the doorway into the room, and dealt the redcoat a terrible blow on the jaw.

Dick was very angry, and struck with all his might.

The fellow threw up his hands involuntarily, thus releasing the girl, and fell to the floor with a crash.

There were two other redcoats in the room.

They stared at Dick in amazement.

He had on a British uniform, therefore he must be one of them, they thought.

Why, then, should he attack one of their number.

He was a stranger to them, however, and although he might be one of them, they did not fancy having him interfere.

"You fool!" cried one. "What do you mean by interfering in this manner? What business is this of yours, anyway?"

"It is the business of any true man to protect ladies from insult!" said Dick, promptly. "I would like to know what right you have to come in here and insult these ladies?"

"The right of might!" replied the redcoat; "we can do it and therefore we will do it if we wish."

"Not while I am around!" said Dick, grimly.

At this instant the redcoat who had been knocked down scrambled to his feet.

The mother and daughter had retired to the farther side of the room and stood with clasped hands, watching Dick and the redcoats, intently, a look of fear upon their faces.

Evidently they were afraid their youthful champion would be severely handled by the three redcoats.

"Curse you!" cried the redcoat, who had been knocked down by Dick; "I'll fix you for this! I'll give you the worst thrashing you ever had in your life!"

"Will you?" asked Dick, coolly.

"I will! Look out for yourself!"

Then the redcoat rushed at Dick.

It was evident that he thought himself capable of administering the thrashing to Dick.

But he was to find that it was no easy task he had undertaken.

When he got within reach of Dick, he struck out rapidly and fiercely.

He was bent on finishing Dick in a very few moments.

Had any of the blows taken effect, there is no doubt but that he would have accomplished his purpose.

But none of the blows took effect.

Dick saw to that.

He dodged, ducked and evaded the blows without much trouble.

He did not seem to be exerting himself greatly.

He waited until the redcoat had become winded from his exertions.

Then when the redcoat dropped his hands from sheer inability to longer hold them up, Dick struck out straight from the shoulder.

His fist took the redcoat fairly between the eyes.

The blow was a terrible one.

The redcoat was knocked off his feet and went down with a crash.

Such was the force with which he struck the floor that the cabin shook.

The redcoat, while not knocked senseless, was so dazed by the shock that he was rendered temporarily incapable of making a movement.

He lay there blinking up at the ceiling.

Judging by the look upon his face, he was trying to count the number of stars dancing before his vision, and finding himself wholly unequal to the task.

The redcoat's companions stared at Dick in amazement.

They could not understand the matter at all.

Their comrade, as they knew, was one of the best men, physically, in the regiment of which they were members.

He was an athlete, and something of a bully, having thrashed a number of the members of his regiment.

Hence they had not thought for a moment but that he would be able to administer a thrashing to this youth, and do it quickly and easily.

But, much to their surprise, it had turned out differently.

Still, even yet, they could not think the youth a match for their comrade, and when the redcoat presently scam-

bled to his feet a second time and rushed at Dick, they thought that this time he would be successful.

But they were destined to be disappointed.

The second attempt by the angry redcoat turned out much the same as the first had done.

It was more disastrous for the fellow, if anything.

As in the former instance, Dick waited till the redcoat had exhausted himself and dropped his hands.

And then he struck the fellow a terrible blow on the chin.

The redcoat was almost lifted from his feet.

Down he went, kerthump!

He measured his full length upon the floor and lay there motionless.

The jar of the blow and the shock of the fall had rendered him temporarily insensible.

The mother and daughter drew long breaths indicative of relief.

Doubtless they were surprised, as were the redcoat's comrades.

These two worthies realized at last that their comrade was no match for the strange youth.

With the realization came a feeling of fierce anger.

They decided to do what their comrade had failed to do.

They would give the youth a good thrashing.

He had been too much for one, but he could not stand up before two, they were sure.

They did not stop to think that two attacking one would be cowardly.

All they thought of was getting even with the youth for the rough manner in which he had handled their comrade, so they leaped forward and attacked him.

Dick was not taken by surprise.

He was expecting some such movement on the part of the fellows.

Therefore he was prepared for them.

If the redcoats and the woman and girl had been surprised before, by the manner in which Dick had vanquished the redcoat, they were more surprised now.

Dick met the two redcoats more than halfway.

In his combat with the first redcoat, he had fought on the defensive, but now he took the aggressive, and attacked the two redcoats with such energy and fury as to disconcert them greatly.

They were not looking for it.

They had expected to do all the attacking, while the youth would be on the defensive. But they quickly found matters reversed.

Dick attacked them so fiercely that they were forced to take the defensive.

More, they soon found that even though there were two of them, this did not make the odds in their favor.

The youth's wonderful quickness and agility counteracted the odds of two against one.

Dick was here, there, and everywhere.

He was all around the two bewildered redcoats and delivered blows from all sides, and with such rapidity that the fellows imagined Dick on all sides at once.

The result was that they were quickly floored.

They scrambled up and tried it again.

With no better success this time.

It took Dick but a very few moments to floor them again.

And this time they lay still for perhaps half a minute.

The blows and the jar when they struck the floor stunned them.

The other redcoat had now regained his senses.

He scrambled to his feet.

He made no motion toward attacking Dick, however.

He had had enough.

The strange youth had knocked him down twice, and he was smart enough to know that he could do it again if necessary.

He realized that he had caught a Tartar.

Dick stood near the centre of the room, his arms folded, and a quiet smile upon his face.

He was ready for the fellow should he show a disposition to renew hostilities.

Being a good judge of facial expression, however, he saw there was no danger to be apprehended from this source.

The redcoat waited until his companions had begun to stir, and then he assisted them to their feet.

They looked dazed and bewildered still.

They did not yet fully know what had occurred.

The redcoat took them by the arms, and, without a word to Dick or the woman and her daughter, led the two from the room.

When outside the door he paused, and, turning, shook his fist at Dick.

"I'll fix you for this yet, my fine fellow!" he hissed. "I'll get even with you for this night's work, or know the reason why."

"Very well," said Dick; "you will find me ready to accommodate you at any time."

A muttered curse was the redcoat's only reply.

And the three disappeared.

Dick stepped to the doorway and looked out.

He saw the three mount their horses and ride away.

They went in a northerly direction and disappeared in the timber bordering the little clearing.

"Have they gone?" asked the woman, in a trembling voice.

"Yes, madam," replied Dick.

"Oh, I am so glad!" exclaimed the girl.

"And I," said her mother. "Oh, sir! how can we ever thank you for what you have done for us?"

"There is no need of thanking me," said Dick.

"Oh, but I don't see how you can make that out! We owe you a debt of gratitude so large that I am afraid we will never be able to pay it off."

"You owe me nothing at all," said Dick. "I simply did my duty, and did for you what I should have expected any true man to have done for my mother and sister under similar circumstances."

"Well, you are certainly entitled to thanks," the woman insisted, "and we do most earnestly thank you, do we not, Mabel?"

"Yes, indeed, mother!" replied the girl, blushing as she met Dick's gaze.

"Very well," laughed Dick; "have it your own way. It is not polite to dispute the word of ladies, so I will say no more."

"I am glad to know that all British soldiers are not possessed of evil natures," said Mrs. Hardy. "But for you, I am afraid I should have formed a very poor opinion of them as a whole."

Dick laughed.

"I don't suppose that all British soldiers are scoundrels, Mrs. Hardy," he said. "But the truth is, I am not a British soldier."

"You are not!" exclaimed Mrs. Hardy and Mabel in unison.

"No, indeed! I am a patriot soldier."

"A patriot soldier!" again in unison.

"Yes."

"But your uniform!"

Dick smiled.

"I know I have on a British uniform, Mrs. Hardy," he said; "but I am wearing it as a safeguard, so that in case I meet any of the British they would as those fellows who were here awhile ago undoubtedly did, think me one of themselves, and thus I would escape capture and possibly death at their hands."

"Ah! I understand!" exclaimed Mrs. Hardy.

"That is a good plan," said Mabel.

"It is a device that has served me well on many occasions," said Dick.

"By the way," he added; "is your husband really a patriot as those redcoats stated?"

"Yes, he is a patriot. I denied it to those redcoats, but I did it for the sake of adding to my husband's safety. All is fair in war, you know."

"Yes, indeed! I know that only too well," acquiesced Dick. "Don't acknowledge to the British that your husband is a patriot. Deny it positively, and then they will have to prove it before they can do anything."

"I shall do so."

"I should like to see your husband," remarked Dick. "He might be able to give me some information that would be of value to me."

"Well, here he is!" said a hearty voice, and turning, Dick saw a man of perhaps forty years of age standing in the doorway.

Simultaneous cries of delight escaped the lips of Mrs. Hardy and Mabel.

"Oh, husband, is it you, and back so soon?" cried Mrs. Hardy.

"Yes, it is I. I got through over in Jersey sooner than I expected, so did not delay, but come back home at once."

"I am glad you did not get back sooner," said Mrs. Hardy, with a nervous little laugh.

"Why so, wife?"

"Because if you had been here, you would have got into trouble."

"Into trouble?"

"Yes."

"How's that?"

"Why, there were some British soldiers here looking for you."

"They said they had heard that you were a rebel, papa, and that General Howe had sent them to get you and bring you before him," said Mabel.

"Oh, that's it, is it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't know whether they would have got me or not, if I had been here," said Mr. Hardy, grimly; "how many did you say there were of them?"

"Three."

"Well, I don't think three would have taken me to General Howe, if I do say it myself. I almost wish I had been here."

"I'm glad you were not," said Mrs. Hardy; "for you might not have come out of an encounter with them as successfully as did this young gentleman here. He thrashed all three of them and put them to flight."

"Oh, it was grand, papa!" said Mabel, who was inclined

to be a little bit enthusiastic; "you should have seen him knock those redcoats around!"

Mr. Hardy smiled and looked at Dick.

"Why," he said, "he is a redcoat himself."

"No, no, papa, he is not; he is a patriot soldier!" cried Mabel quickly and eagerly.

Mr. Hardy looked surprised and somewhat incredulous.

"Then why the British uniform?" he asked.

"I wear it as a disguise, sir," said Dick, quietly. "I find it to be quite a protection when I am in a locality where the redcoats abound."

"Then you are——?"

"A patriot spy, at your service, Mr. Hardy!"

CHAPTER V.

HEADED FOR THE BRITISH ENCAMPMENT.

"A patriot spy!"

Mr. Hardy was surprised.

"Yes, papa!" cried Mabel. "You would know he was not a British soldier or a Tory if you had seen him give those three redcoats that trouncing!"

Mr. Hardy looked at Dick quickly and searchingly.

There was a peculiar, eager light in his eyes, as he asked:

"What is your name?"

"Slater, sir."

"Dick Slater?"

Dick nodded.

"Yes, sir," he replied.

"I thought so," said Mr. Hardy; "you are the famous boy spy who has made such a wonderful reputation during the past year, both as a spy and as the captain of the company of soldiers known as the 'Liberty Boys of '76!'"

Dick smiled.

"I have done some work as a spy," he said, modestly; "and I am the captain of the company of 'Liberty Boys,' and that brings me to the point at issue. I am on a spying expedition now, Mr. Hardy."

The man nodded his head.

"I suspected as much," he said.

"And now, Mr. Hardy, I am going to ask: Can you give me any information that will be of value to me—with regard to the location of the British encampment, I mean; and how best to go about getting into the encampment without being discovered?"

"Yes, I can give you some information," said Mr. Hardy.

"I know where the British encampment is, how far it from here, and the best way to go about trying to sl through the lines."

"Good!" said Dick. "That is just what I wished learn."

Then he remembered Bob who was waiting at the edge of the clearing.

"Wait a moment," he said; "I have a friend outside who will wonder what is keeping me. I will go and get him, and we will be back in a few minutes."

Dick left the room and made his way to where Bob was stationed.

"Great guns, Dick; what kept you so long? I thought I saw those fellows ride away a quarter of an hour ago."

"You did, Bob. I have been talking to the folks who live in that cabin. We're in luck, old man."

"How is that, Dick?"

"Why, those people are patriots, and the man knows exactly where the British encampment is, and will show the way there."

"That's good! But who were the three fellows who were there, Dick?"

"They were British soldiers. They had come there to capture this patriot, Mr. Hardy, but he was not at home."

"And didn't you have any trouble with them?"

"Oh, a little, but nothing to speak of."

Dick's tone was matter of fact, but Bob read between the lines.

He felt that there had been a lively scrimmage in the cabin.

"I wish I had been there!" he said.

"Luckily, I didn't need you, Bob."

The youths were walking across the clearing, leading their horses.

Tying their horses to a couple of small trees standing in front of the cabin they entered.

Dick introduced Bob to Mr. and Mrs. Hardy and Mabel who greeted the youth cordially.

"How far is it to the British encampment, Mr. Hardy?" asked Dick.

"About three miles."

"Through timber all the way?"

"Most all the way, yes."

"Then I think it would be a good idea for us to leave our horses here, don't you, Bob?"

"Yes, Dick. We can walk that distance in an hour, and then when we get there we won't be bothered with our horses."

"You're right. We will leave them here and Mr. Har

will take care of them for us, and then when we want them we will know where to look for them."

Mr. Hardy was quite willing to do all he could to aid the youths, but he was afraid to leave home that night, for fear the redcoats would return, and, although Dick was reluctant to wait, he decided to do so, in order to secure the aid of Mr. Hardy, and the trip up to the British encampment was put off till the next night.

They remained at the home of Mr. Hardy the rest of that night and next day, and then, after an early supper, Dick and Bob bade Mrs. Hardy and Mabel good-by, and, accompanied by Mr. Hardy, set out on their journey.

Mr. Hardy took the lead, as he was familiar with the course to be taken, and the youths were not.

They did not do much talking, as they did not know at what moment they might be in close proximity to a scouting party of the redcoats.

After an hour of steady walking, Mr. Hardy halted.

"We are now within a quarter of a mile of the main encampment of the British," he said. "Now, I suppose you want to know the best way to get into the encampment?"

"Yes," replied Dick.

"Are you both going?"

Dick hesitated and was silent for a few moments.

"I don't think we had better both go, Bob," he said, presently. "I did think we would, but now that we have Mr. Hardy to aid us, I think that you had better stay here, Bob."

"You think so, Dick?"

"Yes; you can remain stationed here where I will know exactly where to find you. I will enter the British encampment alone, will play the spy to the best of my ability, and then if I find out anything of importance, I will slip away from the encampment and come here and tell you the news. If you have to stay here for any length of time, as a day or two, Mr. Hardy can bring you food. Don't you think that a good plan?"

"It suits me, if you say so, Dick. You are the commander of this expedition."

"Very well, then, we will call the matter settled—that is if Mr. Hardy can do his part."

"Oh, I can do my part all right," said Mr. Hardy, promptly. "I shall be glad to give you all the assistance in my power, and even then I shall be greatly in your debt on account of the manner in which you protected my wife and daughter from insult."

"Oh, that is all right, Mr. Hardy; you owe me nothing for that. I was glad to be able to render assistance to your wife and daughter. It was my duty to do so."

The three conversed for a few minutes longer, and each

came to a perfect understanding of what was to be expected from the others.

Then Mr. Hardy gave Dick instructions regarding how he should go in order to reach the encampment.

"You see the campfires?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Dick.

"You will notice that they seem to be on ground considerably lower than this where we are."

"I noticed it."

"Well, the encampment is down in a little valley, while we are on top of a hill overlooking the valley."

"So I judged," remarked Dick.

"Yes, and right in front of us, fifty yards down the side of this hill, is the entrance to a narrow ravine, which extends down to the valley. You can go right down the ravine, and I think you will not have much difficulty in slipping into the British encampment."

"They may have sentinels at the mouth of the ravine," suggested Bob.

"I had thought of that, Bob," said Dick. "I will be on the lookout for them."

After some further conversation, Dick shook hands with Bob and Mr. Hardy, bade them good-by and disappeared in the darkness.

He was starting on a perilous undertaking.

CHAPTER VI.

DICK ENTERS THE BRITISH ENCAMPMENT.

Dick had no difficulty in finding the mouth of the ravine.

He entered it and made his way down toward the British encampment.

He went at a moderate pace until within perhaps seventy-five yards of the end of the ravine, and then he slackened his pace.

He would have to go slowly and be careful.

There might be sentinels on guard at the mouth of the ravine.

Slowly he made his way along.

At last, when within ten or fifteen yards of the end of the ravine, he heard voices.

"Sentinels!" he thought; "I shall have to be very careful."

He crept cautiously nearer.

Presently he caught sight of the sentinels.

There were two of the fellows, and they stood with their backs toward Dick.

They were smoking and talking, and evidently had no suspicion that any one was near.

Dick was within thirty feet of them, and could hear all that was said.

"I wonder what will be the next move of the general," said one.

"I don't know," was the reply.

"Well, I hope that if there is no fighting to be done, we will remain camped here. It is close to New York and we can get over there once in awhile and enjoy ourselves a little bit. It was dry work down at New Brunswick."

"So it was, but if the hints I have heard dropped since we came here go for anything, we are likely to go where we can get all the wet work we want."

"How is that?"

"Why, some of the boys say there is talk that we are to go on board Admiral Howe's ships and take a sail somewhere."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't know that I should object. That would be much easier work than marching and counter-marching over and over again, as we have just been doing day after day for nearly a month past."

"That's right; it would suit me very well, too."

"But where would we sail to?"

"That's what I don't know. No one seems to know anything about that."

"I rather think there is something in that. The general went aboard his brother's flagship this evening, you know."

"Yes, they're figuring about something."

The conversation of the two sentinels now turned on matters of a personal nature, which, of course, did not interest Dick.

He decided to make the attempt to slip past them.

He did not think it would be so very difficult.

The two sentinels were interested in their conversation, and were not paying much attention to their surroundings.

Doubtless they thought there was not much need of keeping a close watch.

They looked upon their work as merely a matter of form.

They did not think the services of sentinels were needed.

Therefore they gave themselves up to the enjoyment of their smoking and conversation.

This was certainly to Dick's advantage.

He stole silently forward.

To get past the two redcoats, he would have to go within ten feet of them.

This made the attempt rather a risky one.

A slight misstep, the kicking of a stone by his foot, the snapping of a twig, might easily betray his presence.

And that would lead to trouble.

But Dick did not intend that either of these things should happen.

He exercised the greatest possible care.

He moved very slowly, and made his way along with all the stealth of a redman of the forest.

At last Dick was out of the mouth of the ravine.

He had passed within ten feet of the redcoats, and had not been discovered.

Dick was not entirely safe yet.

Had the redcoats looked around they would undoubtedly have seen him.

The youth made his way onward as rapidly as possible, however, and trusted to his good fortune to enable him to get out of sight undetected.

He succeeded.

The sentinels were so interested in their conversation that they never looked around, and Dick congratulating himself on his good fortune, made his way onward toward the encampment.

Dick decided that a bold course was the best one, so he walked boldly into the encampment and mingled with the redcoats.

His uniform protected him.

The British soldiers, of course, thought he was one of them.

The only danger was that Dick would run across some one who knew him.

The danger from this source, however, was not great.

There were in the British encampment perhaps one hundred soldiers who would have recognized Dick had they met him face to face.

But there were eighteen thousand men in the encampment, so as may be easily understood the chances that he would encounter one of the hundred who knew him were few.

Dick was willing to take the chances, anyway.

He made his way here and there among the soldiers, and listened to their conversation.

He picked up a number of interesting items of information in this manner.

He made mental note of everything he heard.

Dick had a splendid memory.

He did not need a notebook in which to write down what he heard.

There was no danger that he would forget it.

This was of great aid to him in his work as a spy.

Dick circulated freely among the British.

There was no hesitancy or indecision in his actions.

He made his way about freely and carelessly, the same as did the British soldiers.

No one would have ever suspected from his bearing that he was a patriot spy and that his life was practically in his hands every moment of the time that he was in the British encampment.

But his calm and careless bearing, was, of course, his greatest safeguard.

Any hesitancy on his part, or any queer or unusual actions, would have attracted attention to him and aroused suspicion in the minds of the redcoats.

Dick gradually worked his way through the encampment.

An encampment of eighteen thousand men is no small affair.

It covered considerable ground.

Dick had entered the encampment at the south side.

He had penetrated to the centre, and working his way onward toward the north, he had finally neared the northern edge of the encampment.

And now the unexpected happened.

Dick had not expected to encounter any one who knew him.

But this is just what happened.

As Dick approached one of the campfires, a soldier, turning to walk away, met the youth face to face.

He looked at Dick, and then uttered an exclamation:

"Dick Slater, the rebel spy, by all that is wonderful!" the fellow cried.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE WATERS OF THE BAY.

The fellow's words were heard by all the redcoats in the immediate vicinity.

Exclamations of amazement and wonder escaped them.

"What?"

"Dick Slater?"

"A rebel spy?"

"Surely not!"

"You must be mistaken, Burrows!"

"No mistake about it!" cried Burrows. "He is—catch him, somebody! Don't let him get away!"

Dick had acted.

He knew that to remain would result in his capture.

He was determined not to be captured.

So when Burrows started in to reiterate his statement

that Dick was a rebel spy, the youth whirled and ran away with the speed of the wind.

All was hubbub and confusion behind him.

The redcoats were wildly excited.

They yelled and shouted.

Then they set out in pursuit of the flying youth.

Luckily for Dick the campfire, which he was leaving behind him, was at the extreme northern end of the encampment, and this enabled him to disappear from sight in the darkness very quickly.

"Spread out and hem him in!" he heard a voice say; "the bay is in front of him, he can't get away!"

Dick discovered that the bay was in front of him.

He did not need to hear the statement of the redcoat to become aware of this fact.

Almost the very instant he heard the redcoat's words, Dick's feet left terra firma, and he went plunging headlong into the waters of the bay.

Such a happening, coming unexpectedly, would have demoralized most persons, but not so with Dick.

He was almost as much at home in water as on land.

Dick went underneath the water at the first plunge, but he was on the surface again in a few moments, and without an instant's hesitancy he struck boldly out and swam away from the shore and directly out into the bay.

Dick was not afraid of being drowned.

He was a splendid swimmer.

Of course, handicapped as he was by his clothing, it was rather a difficult matter for even an expert swimmer to make his way through the water with rapidity.

But it was not necessary to swim rapidly, as he was already out of the reach of his pursuers.

True, they might get a boat and search for him, but he felt confident that he could dodge them in the darkness.

Dick was sorry his identity had been discovered.

He had hoped that he would be enabled to remain in the encampment all night, and possibly all next day and the next night.

He had gained considerable information during the brief time that he had been in the encampment, but he had hoped to remain much longer and gain much more information.

However, he was very glad that, his identity having been discovered, he had been enabled to escape capture—immediate capture at least.

For his escape was not yet a positive certainty.

The entire British encampment would be aroused in a very short time.

The news that a patriot spy had been in the encampment would cause great excitement.

Practically the entire army would turn out and try to effect his capture.

The entire shore line of the northern part of Staten Island would be lined with redcoats.

Plainly he could not land at any point on the island.

What then was he to do?

Must he swim across the bay and try to effect a landing at Paulus Hook?

The matter was not left for Dick to decide, however.

He had been swimming lustily, and considering the difficulties under which he was laboring, had made very good progress.

Such good progress had he made, in fact, that suddenly the immense hull of one of the British warships loomed up in front of him.

Something brushed against Dick.

He grasped it with his hand.

It was a rope ladder.

A daring thought flashed into Dick's mind.

Why not board the warship?

Dick decided to attempt it at any rate.

He might fail, but no matter, he would try it, anyway.

He pulled himself up out of the water.

Then he began climbing the rope.

Slowly and carefully he mounted the ladder.

When his head was even with the ship's rail, Dick paused.

He wished to take an observation before proceeding farther.

He heard the measured footsteps of the man on watch.

The sound of the footsteps grew louder and plainer.

The man was approaching.

Dick remained where he was, but kept perfectly quiet.

He was well sheltered and did not think the man would be able to see him.

Presently the form of the watchman loomed up in front of Dick and seemingly not more than six feet distant.

Then the watchman paused, turned around and started back toward the bow of the vessel.

As soon as he had disappeared from Dick's view the youth acted.

He climbed over the rail and reached the deck.

Then he made his way silently and as rapidly as possible in the direction of the cabin.

Reaching it he paused.

He heard the footsteps of the watchman.

The man, in returning to the stern of the vessel, would pass within a yard or two of where Dick stood.

Dick did not fear discovery, however.

The gloom next to the cabin was so deep, so intense, that the eyes of a human being could not penetrate it.

So Dick felt secure.

Dick stood right beside the companionway.

Just as the watchman came opposite the youth, another man came up out of the cabin, passing up the companionway, and within an arm's length of Dick.

The newcomer addressed the watchman.

"Slow work, isn't it, Hawley?" he remarked.

"I should say so!" was the reply. "It seems pretty hard to have to stay here, when the crew of the 'Wales' is over in New York having a good time."

"That's right; it will be our turn, though, one of these days, Hawley."

"I hope so!"

"It will; I understand we are to have shore leave day after to-morrow night."

"Is that so!"

The watchman's tone was eager.

"Yes."

"During what hours?"

"From seven till twelve."

"From seven till twelve, eh?"

"Yes."

"Good! But I'll wager that I won't be able to go."

"Why not?"

"Because, it will be just my luck to have to stay on board and keep watch to see that no one comes along and steals the ship!"

There was a short, ironical laugh.

"Oh, no; you won't have to stay. They will put a couple of the 'Wales' men on board to keep watch. We will all be able to go ashore."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"That will be all right, then."

"Of course. It wouldn't be fair to let all but two or three have shore leave."

"No, it wouldn't be fair at all."

"Not a bit of it!"

Dick was deeply interested in this conversation.

The remark of the watchman, to the effect that he would have to remain and watch the ship, to see that no one came along and stole it, had given Dick an idea.

The magnitude of the scheme which sprang into life in his brain was such as to almost awe Dick himself.

The thought that had so suddenly come to him was: Why should not he and his "Liberty Boys" capture this warship?

He thought of what a stroke this would be.

It would be the greatest stroke of their careers.

The audacity of it almost made the youth himself gasp.

If it could be put through to a successful termination, what a feather it would be in the caps of the "Liberty Boys!"

And Dick believed it could be put through to a successful issue.

One thing Dick knew: If they could capture that ship, they could handle it, for there were fifteen to twenty of the members of the company of "Liberty Boys" who were expert sailors. Their fathers were sailors, and the youths had made voyages with them.

Dick made up his mind then and there that the British warship should be captured if it was possible to accomplish it.

The two redcoats were now talking about matters which possessed no particular interest for Dick, so he gave himself up wholly to the work of planning the manner in which they should go about capturing the warship.

He had no fear of being discovered, so he gave himself up to his thoughts and paid no attention to the two redcoats.

The redcoat who had come out of the cabin paused at the head of the companionway, and, drawing some tobacco from his pocket, proceeded to take a liberal chew.

The tobacco, as it happened, was of the loose sort used for smoking, and there was a goodly portion left in the man's hands after he had taken all he cared to in his mouth.

The redcoat gave a careless swing of his hand, and threw the loose tobacco away from him.

As it happened, the wind was just right to catch the tobacco and blow it full into Dick's face.

Some of it went up his nostrils, and almost before he knew it he had given vent to a vigorous "kerchew!"

The sneeze, coming so unexpectedly, surprised and startled the redcoats as much as it alarmed and disconcerted Dick.

"Great Scott! what was that!" exclaimed one redcoat.

"There's some one there!" cried the other.

"Where? I don't see him."

"No, but we both heard him."

"So we did. Who are you, sir? Come out and show yourself!"

Dick was in a quandary.

He did not know what to do.

So, for the present he maintained absolute silence.

"Come out and show yourself!" cried the other redcoat.

Still Dick made no reply.

He was trying to decide upon a plan of procedure.

Suddenly he made up his mind to try a bold plan.

Leaving the deep gloom cast by the cabin, he stepped out where the faint rays of the moon would strike him.

"Aha! there you are!" exclaimed the watchman, presenting his musket; "who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"I am a king's soldier," replied Dick.

"A king's soldier, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, what are you doing here?"

"Nothing."

Dick decided to be as noncommittal as possible.

"Nothing, eh? Why are you here, then?"

Dick had been thinking rapidly.

An idea had struck him.

"I guess I'll have to tell you," he said, in a semi-reluctant tone of voice.

"Of course you will; go ahead!"

"Very well, I will do so. It was this way: You see, there are a number of fellows in my company who don't like me. They got mad at me because I wouldn't treat them the other day when we were over in the city. They threatened then that they would get even with me, and so to-night, as I was sitting by the fire reading, they slipped up behind me, grabbed me, carried me down to the shore, and threw me into the bay. They threatened that if I tried to come ashore they would throw me in again. So I, knowing your ship was here, swam out to it and climbed aboard. I was sitting down here by the cabin resting and was just on the point of making myself known when your friend here threw some tobacco in my face, causing me to sneeze. It doesn't matter; it's all right now, though."

Dick told this story in a calm, matter of fact manner, which was well calculated to deceive the redcoats.

And it did deceive them.

They did not doubt Dick's story for a moment.

It sounded so reasonable that they could not help believing it.

They knew that they would have been in for serving Dick as he said his comrades had served him, had they been members of his company, so there was no reason why they should doubt his story.

The redcoats laughed heartily.

They seemed to think it was a good joke.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the watchman; "they served you just right, I should say!"

"And I say the same!" said the other; "the fellow who won't take his turn at standing treat ought to be ducked!"

Dick was quite willing that they should look at the matter in this light.

He could afford to stand poorly in their estimation.

He had succeeded in deceiving them, so had all the best of it.

Dick would undoubtedly have come out of this affair with flying colors and would probably have gone ashore in a borrowed boat, had it not been for an unexpected and untoward happening.

"Ahoy, the ship!"

The watchman ran to the stern of the vessel.

"Ahoy, there! Who are you, and what do you want?" he cried.

"We are soldiers from the encampment," came the reply, "and we are searching for a rebel spy who escaped from the encampment a few minutes ago. He leaped into the bay, and we thought perhaps he had swum out and got aboard this ship. Have you seen anything of him?"

The cat was out of the bag.

Dick knew he was in for it now.

CHAPTER VIII.

DICK HELPS HIMSELF TO A BOAT.

The two redcoats on the deck of the ship uttered exclamations of surprise.

They knew that this fellow who had claimed to be a British soldier must be the "rebel" spy in question.

They realized that he had fooled them completely.

They had believed Dick's story implicitly.

It made them angry to think how easily he had pulled the wool over their eyes.

The mere fact of his having come on board the ship in such an unusual manner should have aroused their suspicions; but then, he had told such a good story they could not blame themselves much for having believed it.

"Have we seen anything of him?" repeated the watchman; "I should say we have! He is aboard the ship at this moment!"

"Aha! Good!" came the voice from the boat. "We'll come aboard and get the rascal at once!"

"Will you?" said Dick to himself; "we'll see about that."

The youth leaped around the corner of the cabin at a single bound, and ran swiftly toward the bow of the ship.

"Stop! Hold on!" cried the redcoat who had thrown the tobacco in Dick's face.

But Dick didn't "stop" or "hold on" worth a cent.

He did not intend to remain on the ship and submit to capture.

Not a bit of it.

He had plunged into the waters of the bay once already to-night to escape capture by the redcoats, and he would do the same thing again.

And this he did.

He did not delay an instant.

He knew the redcoats would be on the deck in a few moments, and he did not wish to be there when they arrived, so as soon as he reached the bow, he climbed over the rail and leaped down into the water.

As he did so, he heard the sound of hurrying footsteps on the deck of the ship.

The redcoats were coming as fast as they could.

But they were too late.

Dick was in the water and swimming rapidly away.

Such was his hurry in leaving the ship that he had not taken time to get his bearings, so he did not know in what direction he was going.

The main thing was to get away from the ship as quickly as possible.

He could decide upon his course later on.

Cries and exclamations sounded from the deck of the ship Dick had just left.

The redcoats were greatly disappointed by the escape of their expected prey.

Presently Dick found himself beside another ship.

A thought struck him:

Might he not get aboard this ship, lower a boat and ashore in it?

He decided to try it, at any rate.

There was no rope ladder hanging from the stern of this ship, but Dick knew there was a large cable extending from the bow of the ship down to the water and on down to the anchor which held the ship in place.

He would climb this cable and thus reach the deck of the ship.

He started to swim around the ship from the stern to the bow.

When he had traversed about half the distance, his hand struck against something.

He felt of the object eagerly.

He found that it was the very thing that he needed most—a boat.

Dick quickly climbed into the boat.

To his great joy he found that the oars were in the row locks.

He stepped to the bow and cut the painter.

Then he seated himself, seized the oars and rowed silently away.

"I'm all right now," he said to himself. "This certainly beats swimming. The redcoats will have hard work catching me now."

Dick was an expert with the oars, so he was enabled to

force the boat through the water swiftly and with scarcely any noise at all.

When he had succeeded in placing a couple of hundred yards between himself and the ship, he paused and took a look at his surroundings as well as he could in the darkness.

It was his intention, if he could get his bearings, to row westward through that portion of the bay lying between Staten Island and Paulus Hook, and then on around the west side of the island to about the point where he and Bob had effected a landing that night.

This done, he could make his way to the home of Mr. Hardy and communicate with him and with Bob.

Dick presently located the lights of New York City, and then taking his bearings from this, he headed the boat in the direction which he was sure was the direction he wished to go.

He passed a ship presently.

It was the one he had been on, and which he intended to try to capture.

All was quiet on the ship now.

The redcoats who had been there a short time before searching for him had taken their departure.

Dick rowed steadily onward and succeeded in finding his way through between Staten Island and Paulus Hook.

The campfires of the British along the Staten Island shore aided him in keeping his bearings, and he was so fortunate as to not encounter any of the redcoats sent out in search of him.

Dick rowed steadily onward for perhaps two hours.

He was now well around toward the west side of Staten land.

When he thought he was far enough down, he rowed in and approached the shore.

He did not know but that he might be challenged by a British picket, as had been the case when he and Bob first tried to land on the island that same night.

Much to his relief, however, he was not challenged, and effected a landing in safety. He landed at a point where a little creek flowed into the waters of the bay, and Dick pulled the boat up this little creek a distance of perhaps a few yards and fastened it in such a manner that it would not float away.

"So far, so good," he said to himself; "I really have no complaint to make regarding the way things have gone tonight."

Dick struck into the timber and went in an almost due westerly direction.

Dick realized that he would have some difficulty in finding the Hardy cabin.

He did not doubt his ability to do so ultimately, however.

So he walked onward rapidly and confidently.

It took him nearly an hour and a half, and he walked a mile or so farther than would have been necessary had he known the exact route, but he finally reached the cabin.

It was now about two o'clock in the morning.

Dick wished to learn if Mr. Hardy had returned to his home.

He rapped loudly upon the door.

"Who is there!" came in a startled voice from within the cabin.

It was the voice of a woman—evidently that of Mrs. Hardy.

"It is me, Dick Slater," cried the youth.

Then to himself he said:

"I guess Mr. Hardy has not returned."

Dick heard Mrs. Hardy give utterance to an exclamation.

"I will open the door in a few moments," she said.

"There is no hurry," replied Dick.

A few minutes later the door opened and Mrs. Hardy stood there with a candle in her hand.

"Has your husband returned yet, Mrs. Hardy?" asked Dick.

"No," the woman replied; "and you—why, you're all wet. What has happened?"

"Nothing serious, Mrs. Hardy; I accidentally got treated to a ducking, that's all. So Mr. Hardy has not returned?"

"No; but I supposed you were with him."

"No, I left your husband and my friend together and entered the British encampment alone. I was detected and had to take to the water to escape. I secured a boat, rowed around to the west shore of the island and then came here. I will go on at once. I have no doubt I shall find your husband and my friend waiting for me, where they were when I left them."

"I hope so," said Mrs. Hardy, fervently.

Dick talked with Mrs. Hardy a few moments longer and then bidding her good night took his departure.

CHAPTER IX.

BOB RETURNS TO MIDDLEBROOK.

Dick walked as rapidly as possible.

He was eager to reach the point where he had left his friends.

He was sure, however, that he would find them there waiting for him.

Being familiar with the way, now, he did not have any difficulty in going right.

An hour's walk brought him to his destination.

To his great joy he found Bob and Mr. Hardy at the point where he had left them.

To say that they were delighted to see Dick is stating it very mildly.

They were very well pleased indeed.

"Great guns, Dick!" said Bob; "you don't know how glad I am to see you! I thought sure that you had been gobbled up by the redcoats, and we have been sitting here, trying to figure out what to do ever since we heard the hullabaloo down in the encampment hours ago!"

"We were sure you had been captured!" said Mr. Hardy.

"They did come very near getting me," replied Dick.

"How did you escape?" asked Bob.

"I jumped into the bay and swam out and got aboard one of the British warships."

"Phew! that was risky!"

"And wasn't your presence on board the ship discovered?" asked Mr. Hardy.

"Yes; a boatload of the redcoats came out to the ship in search of me. I had succeeded in fooling the two men on watch on the warship with a story of how I happened to be in the water, but the arrival of the boatload of redcoats searching for me spoiled it all, and I had to take to the water again."

"Phew!" whistled Bob. "You had a lively time of it, didn't you!"

"Fairly so, Bob."

"And how did you escape?" asked Mr. Hardy; "did you swim ashore again?"

"No; I swam to another ship and found a boat tied alongside. I helped myself to the boat and it was an easy matter to escape after that."

"I see," said Bob; "but how happens it you came from the southward?"

"I knew it would not be safe to try to land on the north end of the island, Bob; so I rowed away around to the west side, and, leaving the boat there, walked to Mr. Hardy's home, found that he had not returned, and then came right on up here."

"So that's the way you did it, eh? Well, what are we to do now? Did you learn anything of importance?—or was your identity discovered before you had time to learn anything?"

"I picked up a few items of information, Bob; and I have a big scheme on hand, old man!"

Bob's curiosity was excited at once.

"Have you, Dick?" he exclaimed; "what is it?"

"I'll tell you later, Bob. As there is nothing further that we can do here to-night, we might as well return Mr. Hardy's."

The three set out at once.

As soon as they had got fairly started, Bob asked Dick what the big scheme was that he had spoken of.

"It's an hour's walk to Mr. Hardy's, Dick," he said; "you might as well tell us as we go along."

"Very well," replied Dick.

Then he told his companions of his plan for capturing the British warship.

Bob uttered exclamations of surprise when they learned what Dick's scheme was.

"Say, wouldn't that be a great stroke, though, if we could put it through successfully!" exclaimed Bob; "Dick, it's a great idea, sure enough!"

"It certainly is!" said Mr. Hardy. "If you can capture the warship, and hold it, it might prove to be of great value to the patriot cause before the war is ended."

"That is what I thought," said Dick. "General Washington might need a ship the worst in the world, and then if we had this one where we could reach it handily, we would know right where to find it."

"It is a great scheme!" declared Bob. "I believe we could make a success of it, too!"

"I think so," said Dick.

"It will be easier to capture the ship than to get safely away with it after you have captured it," said Mr. Hardy.

"True," agreed Dick; "but some of the members of our company of 'Liberty Boys' are expert sailors, and I am confident we can get safely away with the ship."

"We'll try it, anyway, old man!" said Bob.

He felt confident that they would succeed.

Bob had great confidence in Dick.

He was sure that Dick would not even think of attempting anything which it would be impossible of accomplishment; and if it was not an impossible undertaking, he was sure the "Liberty Boys" could accomplish it.

"I think I know what you wish me to do, Dick," said Bob, after some further conversation.

"What, Bob?"

"You wish me to go back to the patriot encampment at Middlebrook and get some of the boys and bring them back here."

"That is exactly what I wish you to do, Bob. I wish you to take a letter to the commander-in-chief, too. You need not start before morning, however."

"It's morning now, Dick," with a chuckle.

"I mean before daylight."

"You don't want me to bring the entire company of 'Liberty Boys,' Dick?" asked Bob.

"No; I wish you to select only such as are good sailors. I do not anticipate that we will have to do much in the way of fighting; in fact, we must not do anything in that line, as the least noise when we are making the capture of the ship would ruin all."

"True; well, I will bring the boys who know how to handle sails and run a sailing vessel."

At the end of an hour's walk, the three reached Mr. Hardy's cabin.

There was an extra room, and Dick and Bob were shown into this room.

They lay down and were soon sound asleep.

They slept about three hours.

Then they were awakened by a pounding on the door.

Following this came the stentorian voice of Mr. Hardy.

"Time to get up, boys!" he cried; "it is seven o'clock."

The youths leaped up at once.

They had simply thrown themselves down without removing their clothing, and going out into the main room, they washed their faces and combed their hair.

Mrs. Hardy and Mabel were out in the combined kitchen and dining room, and a few minutes later breakfast was announced.

The youths greeted Mrs. Hardy and Mabel pleasantly, and then all sat down to breakfast.

Dick and Bob were hungry, and ate heartily, much to Mrs. Hardy's satisfaction.

Both Mrs. Hardy and her daughter seemed to think that Dick was the greatest person who ever lived.

What he did for them the night before when he had thrashed the three redcoats had aroused their admiration, and Mr. Hardy had told them the story of Dick's adventures in the British encampment; so this added to their admiration for him. They thought him the bravest, handsomest, and noblest youth they had ever seen.

Especially was this the case with Mabel, who was a really beautiful and sweet girl.

When breakfast was over, Dick asked if there was any ink in the house.

"We have ink, quills, and paper," said Mrs. Hardy.

She produced the articles in question.

"Thank you!" said Dick, and then he sat down and wrote a letter to General Washington.

He told the commander-in-chief what he had learned so far, and then asked permission to try to capture the British warship.

Of course, he would not have dared attempt it without permission.

He did not doubt that Washington would be willing he should make the attempt, however.

He was sure the commander-in-chief would grant him permission to do so.

The great man had never yet refused Dick a favor.

And Dick and his "Liberty Boys" had been so uniformly successful in everything they had attempted that the commander-in-chief had come to have great confidence in them.

When Dick had finished writing the letter, he gave it to Bob.

"Go straight to Middlebrook," he said, "and hand that to the commander-in-chief. I have asked his permission to make the attempt to capture the warship. Wait till he gives you permission to do so, and then go and get the boys and come back here with them. You will have no trouble in getting back before nightfall—though there is no hurry, of course, as we will not make the attempt to capture the ship until to-morrow night."

Then a thought struck Dick, and he went on:

"Perhaps you had better remain there till to-morrow morning and then start, for if a crowd of fifteen to twenty were to come in here this evening, Mr. Hardy would be eaten out of house and home!"

"Not a bit of it!" Mr. Hardy exclaimed; "we have plenty here, and they will be welcome. Let them come this evening. If they should wait till to-morrow and come in the daytime, they might be seen by some of the redcoats, and that might spoil all."

"That is true, too," admitted Dick; "well, come this evening, Bob, but time yourselves so as to get here an hour or two after dark. Then there will be no danger of your being seen."

"All right, Dick," said Bob, cheerily.

Then, bidding all good-by, he went out of doors, mounted his horse, and rode away.

CHAPTER X.

THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GIVES HIS CONSENT.

It was noon when Bob arrived at Middlebrook.

He knew the commander-in-chief would be at dinner, so he ate his dinner before reporting to General Washington.

While eating, he told the "Liberty Boys" the story of Dick's experiences in the British encampment, and on the warship, and then he told them of the scheme which Dick had formed to capture the warship.

The youths became greatly excited at once.

They uttered exclamations of surprise and wonderment.

"Great guns! what will Dick be trying next!" exclaimed Sam Sunderland; "he's the greatest fellow I ever knew."

"He's all right!" said Mark Morrison; "and I'll wager that he makes a success of the attempt, too!"

"So will I!" declared another of the "Liberty Boys;" "he has never yet failed in anything that he has attempted."

"No, he hasn't, and that's a fact," said still another.

"Jove! I hope he will succeed!" said Sam Sunderland; "it will be a great stroke if he does, won't it?"

"It certainly will!" agreed Mark Morrison.

"Are we all to go back with you, Bob?" asked another.

"No; only such of you as know how to do the work that has to be done by a sailor. There will be no fighting, and Dick wishes only such of you as are good sailors."

"That takes in me!" cried Sam Sunderland; "my father is a sailor, and I have made two voyages with him. I can do as much work as any old salt you ever saw!"

"It's the same with me," said Mark Morrison.

Fifteen more of the youths said the same.

Those who knew nothing about ships, or the work to be done in sailing them, looked down their noses.

"We landlubbers are not in luck this time," one said, disconsolately; "however," he added, brightening up a bit, "we have plenty of company. There are a much greater number of us who know nothing about sailing a ship than there are who do know something about it."

"That's right," said another; "and it's lucky, too, for misery likes company."

"It is not absolutely certain that any of us will go as yet," said Bob.

"Why not, Bob?" asked Mark Morrison.

"Well, you see, it is this way, Mark: We have to have the permission of the commander-in-chief before entering upon the affair."

"Oh, I understand. Hasn't he given his permission yet?"

"I haven't seen him. I thought I would wait till after he had had his dinner."

"I see; that is a good plan. But I think he will give his consent, don't you?"

"I hope so!"

Bob waited half an hour or so longer, and then made his way to headquarters.

He was greeted pleasantly by General Washington.

Bob delivered the letter Dick had given him, and then waited eagerly and anxiously until the commander-in-chief read it.

He watched General Washington's face, hoping to receive thereon approval of Dick's plan.

The impassive face of the commander-in-chief gave the youth no clew to its owner's thoughts, however.

Bob could not make a guess as to whether or not the general was favorably impressed by Dick's proposition with regard to trying to capture the British warship.

He would have to remain in doubt until the commander-in-chief was ready to speak.

He did not have to wait long.

General Washington finished reading the letter, folded it up and laid it on a table at his side, and then turned to Bob.

"Well," he said, "this is rather an ambitious undertaking of yours and Dick's, is it not?"

"I don't know," replied Bob; "I think it is quite feasible, don't you?"

The commander-in-chief was silent for a few moments.

"Well, I guess it is," he replied, presently; "it is at least possible of accomplishment—especially by Dick Slater and the 'Liberty Boys.'"

Bob's spirits rose.

He felt sure that the commander-in-chief was going to give his consent that the "Liberty Boys" should make the attempt to capture the warship.

Bob judged so by his looks.

Then, too, his words indicated that he did not look upon the matter with disfavor.

Bob knew that the commander-in-chief had great confidence in Dick.

So he felt sure that he would not refuse the youth's request that they be allowed to try to capture the ship.

And it turned out that he was right.

General Washington asked a number of questions.

He seemed to be considering the matter from all standpoints.

After he had got through questioning Bob, he was silent for a few moments.

"Well," he said, presently, "I guess I shall have to give my consent to let you try your plan. I will admit that I have some doubts about your succeeding, but if you should succeed, it will be a great stroke, and the warship might come in handy later on. Yes, I shall give my consent, and I hope you will succeed!"

Bob was delighted.

His eyes shone.

He leaped to his feet in excitement.

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" he cried. "Dick will be greatly pleased, I know, and I am sure that if anybody could make a success of this affair, he can."

"I think so myself, Bob. How many men will you take with you?"

"Not many, your excellency. Dick said bring only such of the 'Liberty Boys' as know something about sailing a ship. There are about seventeen, I think."

"When will you start?"

"Right away, your excellency."

"And you will make the attempt to capture the ship to-morrow night?"

"Yes, sir; such is Dick's intention. The crew of the ship have shore leave that night, and there will be only a couple of men left on board as watchmen."

"Well, tell Dick that I have every confidence in him, but that I said for him to be very careful to not fall into the hands of the British."

"Very well, your excellency, I will tell him."

After some further conversation Bob bade the commander-in-chief good-by and took his departure.

He returned at once to the quarters occupied by the Liberty Boys."

They were eager to learn whether or not the commander-in-chief was willing that the attempt should be made to capture the British warship.

When Bob told them that General Washington had given his consent, they gave utterance to a cheer.

"Hurrah for General Washington!" cried Mark Morison.

"Three cheers for the commander-in-chief!" cried Sam Underland.

The youths were delighted.

Even those who were not to go on the expedition were pleased to know that the attempt was to be made to capture the warship.

Those who were to go began making preparations at once. It did not take them long.

When they were ready, they went out and saddled and loaded their horses, and, mounting, bade their comrades good-by and rode away.

They rode slowly.

They were in no hurry.

It was now about two o'clock.

They had all the rest of the afternoon to get to their destination.

They reached the strip of water separating New Jersey from Staten Island at about half-past five o'clock.

They swam their horses across and landed on the island. They would not have been surprised had they been challenged by redcoats.

But nothing of the kind occurred.

They had crossed at a point far enough south so that

they did not attract the attention of the British pickets who were well up toward the north end of the island.

Three-quarters of an hour later they arrived at Mr. Hardy's cabin.

Dick was glad to see the youths.

He greeted them pleasantly.

As soon as their horses had been led into the edge of the forest to a point where they would not be apt to be discovered by a prowling band of redcoats, the youths entered the cabin.

They were greeted pleasantly by Mr. and Mrs. Hardy and Mabel.

Dick talked with his comrades for perhaps an hour.

Then he announced his intention of going on a scouting expedition up in the vicinity of the redcoat encampment.

The youths all wished to accompany him.

At first Dick thought he would go alone, but on second thought he decided to let the youths accompany him.

It could do no harm, he was sure.

He did not know whether he would try to enter the camp or not.

He might do so if a good opportunity offered.

Then again he might not.

He had no definite plan in his mind.

There was nothing that they could do at Mr. Hardy's.

He figured that they might as well spend a couple of hours watching the redcoats as to sit in the cabin doing nothing.

So they set out.

They reached the vicinity of the redcoat encampment an hour later.

They remained there an hour or so, during which time Dick made his way down the same ravine he had traversed the night before and listened to the conversation of the sentries.

He picked up a few more points of interest, but thought it best to not risk entering the encampment.

There was too much at stake.

He had a big undertaking on hand for to-morrow night, and if he were to be captured it would spoil all.

So presently he turned his back toward the encampment and made his way back to where he had met his comrades.

They did not linger there much longer.

They started on their return to Mr. Hardy's cabin.

The youths were given the largest room downstairs, and threw themselves down on blankets spread on the floor and slept soundly till morning.

Next morning they made another trip up to the vicinity of the British encampment.

From the top of the hill they had a good view.

The encampment lay almost at their feet with the waters of the bay just beyond.

At anchor in the bay, and as close to the Staten Island shore as they could approach, were the vessels comprising Admiral Howe's fleet of warships.

Dick knew by the location which one of the vessels was the one they were to try to capture, and he sized it up carefully and got its location well fixed in his mind.

The coming night might be dark and it might be difficult to find the right vessel.

Dick's companions eyed the vessel with interest.

They wondered if they would be successful in capturing it.

Dick had brought a quill and some ink, and in a small notebook which he had in his pocket he drew the outline of Staten Island, and indicated by little dots the positions of the vessels comprising the fleet.

This was an important matter.

If they succeeded in capturing the ship they would need to know the location of all the other ships so as to be able to avoid them when taking the ship out of the harbor.

This was going to be a difficult matter at best.

But the youths who were best versed in the sailors' art assured Dick that they could take the ship out of the bay without running afoul of any of the other vessels.

Dick hoped that they would be able to do so.

When they had taken all the observations they deemed necessary the youths made their way back to Mr. Hardy's cabin.

They reached there in time for dinner.

Along toward the middle of the afternoon the sky began clouding up.

"I fear it is going to be a stormy night," said Dick.

"Which will that be, in our favor or against us?" asked Bob.

"I hardly know," replied Dick.

"It will make it easier for us to capture the ship without being in danger of being discovered by the crews of other ships, but it will make it harder for us to handle the ship, that is to say, to sail it out of the harbor."

"Yes," said Mark Morrison; "but with a storm there is always more wind, and it will enable us to move the heavy warship in the still waters of the bay better than we otherwise could. You can't do anything with a ship like that in a calm, you know."

"True enough," acknowledged Dick.

The clouds kept gathering, and, by six o'clock in the evening, the wind was blowing quite strongly, and sounds of distant thunder could be heard.

Immediately after supper the youths set out.

It was an hour's walk to where Dick had left the boat the night before.

Mr. Hardy accompanied them, as he had a small boat hidden not far from the place where Dick had left the boat, and he told Dick he could use the boat if he wished to.

Dick did wish to use the boat, as it was his intention to go ahead in the small boat and board the warship and make sure that everything was all right, before having the "Liberty Boys" board the ship.

They found the large boat where Dick had left it, and all got into it, save Dick.

He accompanied Mr. Hardy to where the small boat was concealed, then having bidden Mr. Hardy good-by, Dick got into the boat and rowed to where his comrades were.

Then they started.

Dick took the lead.

"It is going to be a long, hard pull, fellows," he said "but I guess we can accomplish it."

"Oh, yes, we can make it all right," said Bob. "One thing, the wind is in our favor."

It was not growing dark rapidly.

The clouds added to the darkness, the whole sky being overcast.

Not a star was to be seen.

One thing Dick was glad of, however, and that was that he no longer heard the muttering of thunder, nor could he see flashes of lightning in any direction.

It would have been difficult to accomplish the purpose had a thunderstorm materialized.

They could not have approached the warship undetected as the lightning flashes would have disclosed their presence.

The watchmen would undoubtedly have seen them.

As it was he felt perfectly safe.

In the thick darkness it would be impossible to see the

A slight drizzling rain set in, but the youths did not mind that.

They were tough and hardy.

A little rain would not hurt them.

It soon became so dark that Dick could not see his comrades in the boat behind him, nor could they see him.

In order to make sure that he would not lose them, Dick took the painter of their boat and tied it to the rudder of his boat.

This would make it impossible for the boats to part company.

Their progress through the water was not as rapid as otherwise might have been, but they made very fair time.

It was a two hours' row.

And at the end of that time Dick brought his boat to a stop, the youths in the big boat doing likewise.

Dick could tell by the campfires of the British over on the Staten Island shore that they were not far from the warship for which they were seeking.

"You boys stay here," he said; in a low, cautious tone; and I will go aboard the ship alone. If everything is all right I will signal you from the stern, and then you can come aboard the vessel.

"How will you signal us, Dick?" asked Bob.

"With a lantern."

"With a lantern?"

"Yes; there are some lighted on board, and I will wave one from the stern of the vessel if everything is all right."

"Well, be careful, Dick; don't let them catch you and make a prisoner of you."

"I'll be careful, Bob. Wait here until you see the signal."

Then Dick rowed silently away in the darkness.

The youths sat there in the boat silent and motionless for perhaps twenty minutes.

It may have been slightly longer, it certainly seemed more like an hour to them.

And then suddenly, some distance ahead of them, they saw a lantern swinging to and fro.

"There is the signal, boys!" said Bob in a low, intense tone; "now to capture the British man-of-war!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE "LIBERTY BOYS' " GREAT STROKE.

Then he gave the order to row toward the light.

The youths obeyed.

The youths rowed noiselessly.

They knew that absolute silence was a necessary requisite.

The least noise would attract the attention of the watchmen on the ship.

And then it would be a difficult matter for them to board the ship without an alarm being given.

Bob was at the rudder.

He guided the boat straight toward the point where the lantern could still be seen.

Dick had quit waving the lantern, and held it stationary so as to guide the youths.

Presently they were close under the stern of the warship.

As soon as Dick saw the youths by the faint light thrown down by the lantern, he extinguished the light, leaving all in total darkness.

He was afraid to leave the lantern lighted for fear the watchmen on some of the other ships would see it, or see the youths by its light, and suspect that something wrong was going on.

Dick was confident that they could do their work in the darkness.

"Hold steady, boys!" he said in a low tone. "I'm going to drop down a rope ladder. Make the boat's painter fast to it and then come aboard."

"All right, Dick," came up in Bob's voice.

A moment later something struck lightly in the boat.

It was the end of the rope ladder.

Mark Morrison being near the bow of the boat tied the painter to the ladder, tying it up short.

Then seizing the ladder, he mounted it quickly and noiselessly, and a few moments later was on the deck beside Dick.

One after another the youths followed, and soon all were on deck.

"There is only one watchman," said Dick, in a low tone, "and he is at the bow."

"I thought there would be two," said Bob.

"There was one here at the stern when I came aboard," said Dick; "but I took him by surprise, choked him into insensibility, bound and gagged him. Now we must do the same with the one at the bow."

"That ought to be an easy task for so many of us," said Bob.

"I don't think it will be difficult," said Dick. "We will have to be very careful, however, and capture him in such a manner that he will not be able to give an alarm."

"True, that is very important."

"I think we can accomplish it," said Dick. "I will lead the way; the rest of you boys follow me. I will slip up close to the watchman and leap upon him. If I get my fingers on his throat he will not cry out. As soon as I have seized him, you boys may come to my assistance, so that we may overpower him quickly and easily, as the sounds of anything like a struggle might be heard on board one of the other ships."

"All right, Dick," said Bob; "you go ahead and we will follow close behind you. We will be on hand to help you the instant you have seized the fellow."

Dick stole away, along the deck of the warship.

He made his way slowly and carefully.

It was important that he should be careful.

Discovery and an alarm would spoil all.

And now that success was almost within their reach, Dick did not wish to fail.

Dick was a remarkably shrewd and careful youth.

He knew that when success was almost within a person's grasp that then was the time to exercise the greatest care, as the slightest slip then would ruin all, and Dick did not intend to make a slip.

The other youths kept close behind Dick.

At last they were at the bow of the ship and close to the point where the watchman was pacing slowly to and fro across the deck.

The watchman was visible in the faint light thrown by a lantern hanging at the bow of the ship.

The light was very faint, however.

They could just make out the watchman's form, and that was all.

The light was not strong enough so that watchmen on the other warships could see what might take place on the deck.

In fact, the light was just sufficient to be of benefit to the "Liberty Boys" and yet not be a detriment or make their work more dangerous.

It could not have been better for their purpose.

The watchman was evidently utterly unsuspecting.

He was pacing to and fro, his eyes upon the deck.

Doubtless he was thinking of the good time the crew was having over in the city, and wishing that he might be with them.

Dick slipped up to within a couple of yards of the fellow, and then as the watchman passed the youth leaped forward and seized him by the throat.

The astonished and startled watchman gave a gasp and a gurgle and tried to cry out, but could not.

Dick's fingers encompassed the fellow's throat in a steel-like grip and the watchman could make no outcry.

Bob and the other "Liberty Boys" leaped to Dick's assistance.

They seized the watchman and overpowered him in a twinkling.

Knowing that the ship was practically deserted, the youths carried the watchman into the cabin.

Then they tied him hand and foot and gagged him.

"There!" said Dick, when this had been accomplished, "we are the masters of this ship. Now to get away from here with it!"

"That is going to be a rather difficult job," said Bob.

"But we can do it all right," declared Mark Morrison, who was admittedly the best sailor of all the youths. "I know this old harbor like a book, and will guarantee you that I can take the ship around these other ships and out through the Narrows without hitting anything, and without running aground."

"All right, Mark," said Dick; "I will put you in charge

of the wheel, and you may have entire command. Tell the boys what sails you want set and they will go to work."

Mark told the youths what sails he wished set, and they all went on deck.

The youths who were to handle the sails made their way up into the rigging.

It was so dark they could not see their hands before their faces.

But they did not need to see to do the work.

The sense of feeling was sufficient for the purpose.

Mark took his place at the wheel.

Dick and a number of the youths found the capstans and went to work getting the anchor up.

They accomplished this by the time the boys in the rigging had loosened the sails, so that as soon as the sails were set and the wind filled them, the ship would begin to move.

It took the youths in the rigging perhaps twenty minutes to set the sails.

Then the ship began to move through the water.

Mark, at the wheel, soon proved that he understood his business.

He managed the wheel with consummate skill.

He brought the ship around into the wind in a manner that would have done credit to an old salt of many years' experience.

As the ship came into the wind, the sails filled to their utmost capacity.

The ship began to move faster.

Dick had extinguished the light in the lantern hanging at the bow.

He knew that a moving light would attract the attention of some of the watchmen on the other ships, and arouse their suspicion.

Mark guided the ship unerringly.

He seemed to possess the cat-like faculty of seeing in the dark.

He had taken a critical survey of the warships the morning from the top of the hill on the north end of Staten Island.

In his mind's eye he could see the position of every one of them.

Then, too, each and every one of the warships, other than the one the "Liberty Boys" were on, showed red lights at both bow and stern, thus marking their position.

This made it an easy matter for Mark to keep clear of them.

But there was one thing he had not counted on, and could not have guarded against it had he done so.

And suddenly the thing which we have reference to happened:

A boatload of redcoats from one of the ships, returning from New York City, happened to be right in the path of the ship as it came along, and the ship's bow struck the boat at about the centre, crushing in the side as if it was an eggshell.

The boat sank instantly, leaving its late occupants floundering in the water.

Yells, curses, and cries for help went up from the frightened redcoats.

"Great guns!" exclaimed Bob, who with Dick stood near Mark at the wheel. "We have run into a boat!"

"Yes," replied Dick; "and I fear a general alarm will be the result."

"Give us ten minutes longer," said Mark, "and they can raise all the alarm they want to." They will be unable to catch us. Once we are past the warships and headed out toward the Narrows, with the ships behind us, and I will defy any of them to catch us or stop us, for that matter!"

"They might open fire upon us with their cannon!" said Bob.

"Let them!" said Mark. "They could not see us and could have to shoot by guess. They couldn't hit us in a thousand years."

It soon became evident that the outcries of the men from the foundered boat had attracted the attention of the watchmen on the decks of several of the warships nearest to the scene of the accident.

The alarm soon became general.

Signals were exchanged between the different warships. Then the alarm gun on Admiral Howe's flagship boomed out its warning.

"Jove! we're in for it now!" cried Dick. "That will arouse the whole fleet!"

"So it will," said Mark; "but we'll fool them yet!" But still another surprise was in store for the youths. Suddenly flaring lights appeared on all the warships.

These lights were made by setting fire to tar and oakum. The tar and oakum were in iron kettles, and these kettles were suspended by chains from the yard-arms.

There were two or three hundred kettles and the tar and oakum blazing up briskly made quite an illumination. The warships could be seen plainly by Dick and his comrades.

And as the ship they were on was within the scope of the light covered by the illumination it would undoubtedly be seen.

That it was seen was soon made evident.

Shouts and yells were heard from the different warships.

The sounds of the voices of the officers of the different warships giving orders could easily be heard.

The men on the decks of the warships could be seen also.

They were hurrying hither and thither.

They were getting the guns ready.

It was evident that they were going to open fire.

The redcoats had evidently leaped to an understanding of the situation instantly.

The manner in which the warship was slipping past them and heading out toward the ocean was proof positive to them that those on board the warship were their enemies.

They did not stop to ask themselves how it had happened that the hated "rebels" had gotten possession of the vessel.

There was no time for this.

The fact was before them, and they must deal with it.

They could learn the whys and wherefores later on.

Work, and quick work, too, would be needed if they were to foil the daring attempt to steal the warship.

They did not doubt but that it would be necessary to destroy the warship to prevent the "rebels" from escaping with their booty.

But they would not hesitate to do this.

The loss of the ship through its being sunk in the harbor would be nothing as compared to the loss of it through the "rebels" getting safely away with it.

Then, too, should they succeed in sinking the vessel, they could be reasonably sure of encompassing the destruction of the bold and audacious "rebels."

This would compensate them for the loss of the ship.

Dick and his comrades knew what the flaring lights and hurrying to and fro of the redcoats on the ships' decks foreshadowed.

"They will open fire upon us in a few moments," said Dick; "they may succeed in sending us to the bottom, after all."

"They'll have to hurry, then," said Mark Morrison; "we will be out of range of the light thrown by the torches in a very few moments, now."

"There go some men aloft on two or three of the ships," said Bob; "they are getting ready to follow us, in case they fail to send us to the bottom."

"Yes," said Dick; "they seem to be determined to make assurance doubly sure."

The ship was now forging through the waters of the bay at a rapid rate.

It would soon be lost to the sight of the British in the deep darkness beyond the radius of the light thrown out by the blazing torches.

But they were not to become hidden in the darkness quick enough to escape being fired upon.

Suddenly the roar of cannon was heard.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Three different cannons were fired, one after another.

Two of the cannon balls missed the ship altogether, but the third struck one of the yard-arms and snapped it off like a pipe stem.

It happened to be a yard-arm that was not in use at the time, so no particular damage resulted.

"Phew!" whistled Bob; "that sounds like business, does it not?"

"They'll sink us if they can!" said Dick, grimly.

"It'll be an accident if they hit us in such a manner as to do us serious injury," said Mark; "those gunners are too excited to shoot straight."

"I don't know about that," said Bob. "The fellow who aimed the cannon from which came the ball that shot off that yard-arm may do better next time."

"It was an accident," said Mark, who did not seem to hold the marksmanship of the redcoats in very high esteem. "His next shot will probably miss us a hundred yards, and then we'll be out of sight in the darkness in a few moments."

"I wish we were out of sight now!" laughed Bob. "I don't fancy having cannon balls thrown at me in that careless fashion!"

Several more shots were fired at them before the ship got out of sight, and one or two of them came dangerously near.

All the "Liberty Boys" drew long breaths of relief when they finally realized that they were again entirely enveloped in the darkness.

They thought that when they were out of sight, the British would cease firing.

But they were mistaken.

The British kept right on firing.

Guns on nearly every one of the ships were brought into action, and cannon balls flew thick and fast.

The "Liberty Boys" were on a great strain.

To know that cannon balls were whistling toward them and past them, and not know but what they might be hit at any moment, made it very trying on the nerves.

They were brave youths, however.

Their nerves were like steel.

Not a murmur escaped any of them.

They were willing to take their chances.

If they were hit, they could not help it; if they escaped being hit, well and good.

And they did escape.

Nor was the ship injured—at least not seriously.

Dick and his comrades began to have hopes that they would escape and get away with the captured warship in safety after all.

The British gunners suddenly ceased firing.

While the warship the "Liberty Boys" were on was enveloped in darkness and could not be seen by the British, the youths could still see the British warships distinctly.

They saw why the firing had ceased.

Three of the warships had up sails, slipped their cables and were now coming in pursuit of the vessel the youths were on.

"They are giving chase to us," said Dick.

"Yes," said Bob; "but I'm glad of it. I would rather have three ships chasing us than a hundred cannons firing at us. The change is a welcome one to me."

"But they will probably keep firing at us," said Dick.

"Maybe not," said Bob; "anyway, they will be unable to do much shooting from aboard a moving ship."

"True," said Dick; "I rather think myself that our greatest danger now lies ahead of us. If Mark should fail to find the way out through the Narrows we would run ashore and our enterprise would end in disaster."

"That's right!" agreed Bob.

"But I won't fail, Dick!" said Mark, confidently; "my father has been a pilot here for years, and he has often said that I know as much about New York bay and the course to be taken in reaching the open ocean as he himself knows. I have often heard him say he could take a ship out into the ocean no matter how dark it was. And I am sure I can do the same."

And he did.

It might be that he could not have done the same thing again in a dozen trials; be that as it may, he succeeded this time, and that was the main thing.

The pursuing warships fired a few shots, but they all went wild and no damage was done.

The youths sailed the captured warship out through the Narrows, along past the end of Sandy Hook, and out into the open ocean.

"Which direction now, Dick?" asked Mark. "We have plenty of room now, and can go where we wish."

"Do you know of any little bay down on the Jersey coast where we can take the ship and hide it?" asked Dick.

"I know the very place," said Mark. "It is about fifty miles down the Jersey coast. It is a little bay well hidden behind a high headland and almost completely surrounded by heavy timber, which will keep the masts from being seen from the ocean side. I don't think the British could find the ship if they were to look for it a year. The only trouble is, that we will have to go down there and lay on and wait till morning, as the entrance is very narrow, and we could not dare try entering in the darkness."

"Head that way at once, then, Mark," said Dick; "we will enter that bay and leave the ship there until we need it again."

The pursuing warships did not follow farther than the arrows, so the youths were in no danger of being captured.

They sailed down the coast till they were about opposite the bay in question as nearly as Mark could guess, and then lay off and on till morning.

As soon as it was light enough, they entered the little bay and came to anchor.

The "Liberty Boys" had been successful.

They had captured a British man-of-war, which was undoubtedly one of the greatest of the many great feats performed by the "Liberty Boys" during the Revolutionary War.

It was indeed a great stroke.

THE END.

The next number (18) of "The Liberty Boys of '76" will contain "THE LIBERTY BOYS' CHALLENGE; OR, PATRIOTS VS. REDCOATS," by Harry Moore.

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